

Comments from Councilmember Valerie Ervin
World War II Tribute
Silver Spring Civic Building
Wed., Sept 19 at 10:30 a.m.

Good morning, my name is Valerie Ervin. I am the daughter of a career Air Force enlisted soldier and a Montgomery County Councilmember. My father left Alabama in 1945 to join the Army. He first enlisted in the Army, and when President Truman signed the executive order integrating the military, he enlisted in the Air Force.

I was born on Anderson Air Force Base on the island of Guam to two very young parents. My four siblings and I grew up on military bases, and we moved around a lot.

I remember my mother starching and ironing my father's fatigues. On Sunday nights, when my father was home, he would bring his shoe kit into the living room and polish his boots and his dress shoes until they shined like glass.

I was always proud of my father. As I was growing up, I never fully understood what he was doing for the almost thirty years he served our country, and that he was willing to give his life in that service. This became true for me, when my father was deployed to Vietnam to serve there for one year. I was in junior high school, and I remember how unpopular the war was at the time.

We didn't have the Internet, so we wrote lots of letters back and forth. My father would send pictures of the children who lived in the villages of Vietnam and Thailand and would write about how terrible life was for them during the conflict. When my father returned home, he didn't talk much about his experience for many years, until he got sick from exposure to Agent Orange.

He visited me before he died. He was very ill, but he still wanted me to take him to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. I had never seen my father shed a tear until then. He spent hours searching for the soldiers that he served with, and I remember him standing at the wall for a long, long time. Afterward, he talked about the friends that he had lost and how the sacrifices of those men should never be forgotten. Going through this experience with my dad, had a profound effect on me.

I am wearing two buttons today: one is a photograph of my father in his fatigues taken around 1973; the other is of my nephew, a staff sergeant who is serving in the Air Force and just returned home from Korea.

Military families make tremendous sacrifices every day. The courage and optimism that is necessary to bear the long separations from loved ones is more difficult than many people will ever know.

My father's military service inspired me to a life of public service. There is not a day that goes by that I don't talk to him and ask him for his advice. Today we are here to say thank you.

President Obama said it best in his speech at the Democratic Convention, "Yes, our path is harder, but it leads to a better place. Yes, our road is longer, but we travel it together. We don't turn back. We leave no one behind." So many of your lives are based on these principles, and your service to our nation is what makes America the greatest place on Earth. Thanks for your commitment and sacrifice on behalf of a grateful nation.